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~~SCRAPPING SALT 2 LIKENED TO CUTTING OFF NOSE TO SPITE FACE~~

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WASHINGTON

Former CIA Director William Colby said Wednesday the administration's plan to scrap the SALT 2 nuclear arms agreement would close an important window for peering in on Soviet military capabilities.

"We don't have a Moscow edition of Aviation Week" to read for data on Soviet weapons systems, Colby said, referring to the authoritative American journal that reports in detail on American military weaponry.

Colby, CIA director in the Nixon and Ford administrations, and Walter Slocombe, defense undersecretary in the Carter administration, argued during a news conference sponsored by the Arms Control Association that key SALT 2 verification provisions are of great use to U.S. intelligence.

If the agreement is scrapped, said Slocombe, "we will lose important advantages we have."

"We have to be very careful to guard against the desire to cut off our noses to spite our face," Slocombe said.

Taking that course, said Colby, "means we're back to the dark shadows of Russian tradition -- trying to find out what they're doing without any extra help."

"SALT 2 does not make them totally transparent by a long shot. They still have the basic thought process of trying to keep secrets," said Colby. "But the fact is they have gradually been forced into an exposure of their strategic weaponry to a degree which is really quite startling."

President Reagan announced in March that because of widespread Soviet violations of the 1979 agreement, signed by President Carter and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev but never approved for ratification by the Senate, his administration would end its policy of voluntary compliance with its limits on strategic weaponry.

The United States is in compliance for now, but is scheduled to breach the limits this fall when new B-52 bombers carrying cruise missiles are deployed. However, Reagan said he would take Soviet behavior into consideration when he makes the final decision.

Colby and Slocombe agreed that the Soviets have violated the treaty, but characterized Reagan's response as overkill.

"The United States ought to judge whether it remains in treaties not primarily by consideration of abstract issues of international law, but by whether it serves our interest," Slocombe said.

They said SALT 2 gives the United States access to information on Soviet nuclear tests, requires Soviet notice of where test facilities are and what kinds of weapons are being used.

Those provisions, because the Soviets can get data on U.S. tests through other means, are an "unearned unilateral advantage" for the United States, Slocombe said.

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"It enables us to know in great detail things that 20 years ago we wouldn't have dreamed of knowing in terms of the precise location, precise characteristics, the precise numbers of all these different systems aimed at us," Colby said. "Are we going to go back into the business of having to chase for it, to look for every last one?"

Slocombe said the Soviets could respond to an American termination of its SALT 2 obligations by covering over test facilities to shield them from the view of U.S. satellites. "We'd lose a great deal of the information we have now," he said.